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THE MOST INTERESTING LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Helen,

I wonder if it is possible to use language carefully enough to prevent The Creative Woman's autonomic nervous system from slipping into spew.

I do not understand how any reasonable person can doubt in view of the tremendous fecundity of this planet that god embodies the female principle or vice versa, if you prefer.

The beneficial effect in terms of accelerating proliferation of species that the creation of two sexes accomplished has long been freely acknowledged (I think). I happen to be of the second sex, ancillary but nevertheless essential, now, to female fecundity.

It seems perfectly rational that a primitive male should attempt to remedy his secondary importance by manipulation of society and creation of alternative religions to that of the earth goddess. These puerile attempts to invert the natural hierarchy of the universe should not be of serious concern to any truly educated person.

All of which is a long way around to saying that it saddened me to see The Creative Woman devote so much space in riposte to masculine shiboleths.

The task a woman faces is, to paraphrase Browning, to rustle her limbs and shake off the animus constraints within herself. Actually a woman's creativity only seems blunted -- as suggested by the Professor of Linguistics. Man, slyly and with some concealed amazement at his success, threw a cloak of denigrating words over woman -- thus trying to change subjective reality.

Women were, are now in daily life, and will continue to be fecund physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Stowe, Woolfe, Cobbe, Nightingale, Curie, Sands, Dickenson would not, I think feel particularly honored to be singled out from the millions of women who daily live creatively.

I beg of you do not illustrate, calibrate or compare women's creativity on scales prepared by men. Women do not achieve creativity because they transcend men. It is proper that men should seek to create a flood of music, of art, of science, of poetry, of writing, of things. So, too, will women if they desire. But since my infancy I have encountered womens creativity in a thousand awarenesses, a thousand empathies, a thousand thousand dispassionate evocations of reality, and in a myriad of other intuitions set continuously before me that I may become civilized.

Why is it, do you suppose, that almost all men, and certainly myself, are compelled to seek sexual communication with women? And they to respond? It is under the direction of the creative fecund plasma of the universe. And I submit that despite the hideous distortions this culture imposes upon the sexual realm, I am compelled to seek the sexual companionship of woman that we may be warmed by the non-cerebral, non-verbal, female source of our existence.

Love,
Doug

We read and discussed this letter at a Creative Woman staff meeting. Everyone had something to say. No one was "non-cerebral" or "non-verbal". We like the "female fecundity" part and all that. A contest for our readers: We'll publish the "Most Interesting Answer" in our next issue.

FROM THE EDITOR'S BED

How I Became an Instant Expert on Female Sexuality....

As usual, I was in bed when the phone rang. This time someone wanted me to speak to the South Suburban Woman's Liberation Group. "On what?" "On anything". "Well, I'm reading the Hite Report now, so I guess I'll speak on female sexuality". "Fine".

In my talk I did not deal with: abortion, birth control, childrearing, the ERA, frigidity, Lesbianism, lifestyles, masturbation, menstruation, menopause, pregnancy, prostitution, or rape. What I did talk about was how we women have been sold a bill of goods, of contradictory and demeaning stereotypes, from which we now are struggling to free ourselves, documenting my ideas by citing evidence from biology and mythology. It was fun, for me at least. We are in a period of transition, of redefinitions, and we have options.

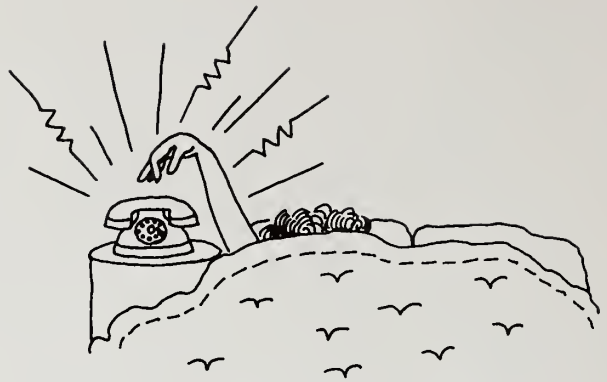
I will send the list of references used in preparation of the talk to anyone who writes to me, requesting it.

Preview of Coming Attractions

With this special issue on Women in Literature we welcome SHIRLEY KATZ as guest editor. This is the first in a series devoted to special themes to be edited by women with a special interest and competence in those areas. Katz is a writer, singer, songwriter, and feminist activist. She brings to the newsletter her own special style and pungent insights. We are fortunate to have her.

Manuscripts are eagerly solicited from you readers out there! Contributions may be sent either to the editorial office at Governors State University or directly to the editors of special themes listed below:

Winter 1978: Women in Religion and Philosophy -- articles on mythology of women, primitive matriarchy, women in the clergy, leaving an order or changing one's "habit", et cetera; deadline December 21, 1977; Guest Editor: Rev. ELLEN HARVELL DOHNER, 315 Wildwood, Park Forest, Il. 60466.



Spring 1978: Women in Science -- as investigators, scholars, teachers, collaborators with men, their contributions, et cetera; deadline March 21, 1978; Guest Editor: Dr. HELENE GUTTMAN, Office of the Director, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Bldg. 31/Rm. 5A33, Bethesda, Md. 20014.

Summer, 1978: Women in Art -- the visual arts, the lives and works of women both traditional and contemporary, in articles, prints, photographs (we hope to go into color for this one, if funding is adequate); deadline June 21, 1978; Guest Editor: BETYE SAAR, 8074 Willow Glen, Hollywood, Ca. 90046.

Fall 1978: Politics and the Study of Politics -- women in political theory, government, administration, public affairs; deadline September 21, 1978; Guest Editor: Professor SARA SHUMER, Haverford College, Haverford, Pa. 19041.

You see assembled here an impressive array of talent, of brilliant and creative women who are committed to sharing their gifts and to encouraging their sisters. But this newsletter will only become a significant effort if you our readers write, contribute your ideas and your money, subscribe and recruit new subscribers from your friends and relations. We have the nucleus. Let's go!

HEH

THE MIND UNBOUND

The belief systems of our culture provide a certain amount of security to us as individuals and as members of our culture. They also constrain and constrict our thinking by serving as a form of foot-binding of the mind. There is the possibility of permanent deformity.

Beliefs about the nature and role of women (and men) have been a powerful mind-binder, a kind of Ace bandage on the brain. Some of us haven't started the unwrapping process. We are content. Others of us cling desperately to our bindings, snatching dirty discarded theories from others to maintain our fuzzy-headed condition, plucking fresh assumptions out of thin air to patch the holes in our hypotheses. A few of us are bouncing around half unwrapped, overflowing here, bulging in spots from the sudden release of pressure. Onlookers may react with fright or rejoice with us at our newly found vigor and creativity. When we trip over the dangling particles of our forgotten bindings we pause to continue the stripping process.

As we unwind our bindings we notice retained impressions, interlocking patterns and worn pathways. We apply soothing meditation, sprinkle some new concepts where retardation is apparent and allow fresh images and bright visions to awaken dormant areas.

We almost overlook the taboo patch. Can there still be unspeakable, unmentionable thoughts? Heretofore unthinkable thoughts?

Picking through the discarded bindings we easily recognize the intensely-hued "truths" and the heavenly-blue beliefs. These, we notice, have colored our perceptions, bled onto what and who we value and stained our understanding of what we are and what we can be.

As we sort the old wrappings for something worth saving we gently retrieve our dearly beloved aesthetic standards. Surely, now that we have torn off the subjective coverings of the old arbiters' findings and are discovering and reevaluating artists and writers who have been overlooked, undervalued or forgotten, we can retain our hard-won good taste and high standards. These, culture-bound though they be, are too pure and lofty to have been contaminated by our old beliefs about the nature and role of women. Defiantly we brush off the dust of the dust of the ages, rub our fingers futilely over the dark spots and stuff our Beauty and Truth back into our minds. Though a few loose ends dangle we are secure in the conviction that with a little trimming, a few appliques and a touch-up here and there these old wrappings will serve us well in the days to come.

Scooping up the rest of the bindings we jam them back into our old filing place and leap with joy and abandon into the unknown future of our unbound minds.

S.K.

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IMAGES OF BLACK WOMEN IN LITERATURE

Historically, the annals of the Black experience show that African-Americans have constantly found themselves in a cultural climate which has created within their minds a distorted and negative self image. This distortion has permeated our entire being and has led to self-destructive attitudes and negative behavior which have often prohibited us from achieving a worthwhile state of nationhood and unity. The cultural environment has given continuous endorsement of and rationale for the treatment of Black people and has perpetuated negative images of Black people.

The plight of the Black woman has been extremely dismal even in the context of the overall Black experience in America. In the land of Puritan morality, where white womanhood has been placed high on a pedestal, the Black woman has been accorded neither honor for her womanhood nor respect for person. With no legal protection, she was ever the prey of the salacious male, Black or white. Too often, in the past, she was given choice neither of husband nor father of her children. It was to be several decades after Emancipation before her position was greatly altered. It is a tribute to her basic nobility that by dint of dogged, almost militant determination, she has managed to achieve and successfully maintain a higher status.

Has the Black woman been depicted accurately in literature? Has she been clearly defined and interpreted? Mary Helen Washington (1975) offers answers to these queries in the Introduction to Black-Eyed Susan, a collection of short stories by and about Black women. She points out that "Stereotypes about Black women abound like weeds in this society." Professor Washington emphasizes the influence white media have in creating perverted fantasies which evidence abuse of the Black woman's image. She insists that this habitual abuse still persists:

...People other than the Black woman herself try to define who she is, what she is supposed to look like, act like and sound like. And most of these creations have very little resemblance to real, live Black women.

Why is it, in a society where "Black is beautiful", that "Black women are beautiful" has meaning only as a rhetorical exercise. Even as we bear in mind that "Black is beautiful" has nothing to do with physical appearance, color still remains a major factor in descriptions of attractiveness and unattractiveness. Although it is known that there are individuals who are considered more attractive than others in all races, color alone has, for a long time, determined that Blacks, particularly Black women, were unattractive. The practice persists: Black women have been, and still are, judged, by whites and Blacks alike, according to the Euro-American standard of beauty and femininity.

It is with the imposition of this and other negative images that the white man began to divide, undo, and defeat us. The oppressor created an image of Black women as morally loose and lascivious. The white man proceeded to carry out his deliberate destruction of Black male-female relationships by raping Black women repeatedly and convincing some Black men that Black women wanted to be raped and solicited rape. Maulana Ron Karenga (1975) points out in his article "In Love and Struggle: Toward a Greater Togetherness" that "Historically black women and men have heroically fought and resisted the white man's sexual war against Black women." Black men have died to defend their women but the oppressor has methodically suppressed such history and literature. Consequently, oftentimes we too wonder and doubt.

Calvin Herton (1965) in Sex and Racism states that:

The personality, or ego of the Negro woman is a product of and a response to all of the American society. Among these forces racism, or white supremacy, has had the most powerful effect...

Not only has racism determined the way whites treat and conceive of the Black woman, more importantly, it has shaped the way Black men treat and conceive of the Black woman. The very attitudes that Black women have towards themselves are outgrowths of

racist propaganda. A tragic number of Black American women are haunted by a sense of self-rejection. This rejection is basically attributed to the fact that they are Black and have Black features and have been led to believe a propaganda of history and literature in which they can find no glory or dignity for themselves as females.

We have a great task to achieve through our literature. Many myths - matriarchy, immorality, ugliness, uncouthness - have been created by American literature to denigrate the Black woman and destroy her image, "to reduce to rubble and raw sex her relationship with her man and to deny and cover up her contribution in our struggle to be a free and creative people." (Henton, 1965) We can no longer afford to collaborate in, advocate, or permit the perpetuation of the blatantly vile and vulgar images invented, imposed and disseminated by the oppressor.

Black people must create and construct their own myths. These myths must accurately and positively reflect all aspects of the Black experience. The use of the term "myth" is not to suggest that we must invent and impose lies. What it means is that we must redefine and reinterpret the images of Blacks in literature.

We must dispel the image of the Black matriarch and revere and honor Black womanhood. We must annihilate the image of the shiftless and irresponsible Black man. We must crush the perpetuation of the images of the contented slave, the tragic mulatto, the buffoon, the exotic primitive, the buck or brute, the wretched free Black and the countless other demoralizing images in literature. Whether the white literary critics were viewing those images as reflective truth or as stereotyping no longer matters.

Our literature must say those vulgar images do not reflect our reality. We cannot deny the existence of slavery and the role it played. Neither can our literature. But we can define slavery and its victims from a Black perspective. So can our literature. Because the image of Black womanhood has been placed in the most distorted perspective, our literature may begin here with the important task of myth building.

Hernton says that the historical and literary annals of man's inhumanity to women have yet to record the epic of the Black woman's ordeal in America. We can begin to shape and mold images of Black womanhood which positively depict and enhance Black nationhood. Black women are just beginning to be appreciated as human beings, as sexual creatures clothed in their own personal skins, as American citizens with public rights and duties and as individuals with private longings and desires. The change is just beginning and the beginning is tardy. The beginning must be recorded in our literature.

If, as a Black people, we truly believe in the liberating forces of knowledge, where do we gain knowledge of and insight about Black women? Franz Fanon (1965) has said that the "success of any revolutionary struggle depends on the range and quality of female participation, on women becoming women for action rather than exclusively women for marriage and sex." Those persons who can best define Black women are Black women. Yet, the writings of major Black women novelists are almost never taught in American literature courses and are rarely mentioned in women's studies courses.

I cannot be so chauvinistic as to assume that only Black women can write about Black women. I can not be so narrowminded as to assume that there is only one image of Black womanhood. Black womanhood is many things to many people. All Black people are not alike. All Black people do not have the same viewpoint or perspective even when they use the same words. I would like to suggest, however, that our literary pursuits focus upon content and content analysis that create and perpetuate positive images of Blackness and Black womanhood.

If literary content reflects current attitudes, images and definitions of Black womanhood from a Black, and, more importantly, a Black female perspective, then we are achieving our goal in literature no matter who or what the author may be. Black women writers can provide leadership roles in this endeavor. Through our literature we can teach a new vision of Black revolution and freedom. We can teach new values and appreciation for the human personality regardless of sex. Through our literature we can teach respect and honor for Black womanhood.

Alma Walker-Vinyard University Professor of English Governors State University

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GONE

Living
without you
is a cavernous
emptiness
with death's
chilled wind
whistling to
nowhere
through the frozen
hollow

Emily Wasiolek

NOVEMBER 1

Driving in the late afternoon
through cornfields no longer light
I see armies of women, caught in the wind
these straight rows of cornshocks
are marching under somber skies.
Their mural of shadows moving
on the ground, dying with the dusk.

NOVEMBER 2

I am watching my mother die.
In her delirium she calls me
by the name of her pet dog.
We two are frightened by the
death at hand and in our hearts.
This is the final atmosphere
more rarified than any.
It is my turn as I bend over you
to offer last consolation,
bringing you into my arms
for now it is clear we are dying together.

NOVEMBER 3

I see blood in my future.
Not the blood of war
not special blood
I see blood smeared on the
side of my head,
coming from my shattered skull
open and bleeding.

This blood is no accident.
Nor is this stickiness
new blood--someone else's.
By it I am forewarned that
I must be ready
and beware the traitor in my mind
who enters unannounced
to bear these frightening visions.

Suzanne Prescott

ABOUT TRANSLATIONS

(In response to a poem by Adrienne Rich)

"Certain words occur; enemy, oven, sorrow
enough to let me know she's a woman of
my time..."

But sitting down another time
you might have seen

"Listen, telephone, anger..."

and were reminded that to say
"Listen" is to hear
the silence of countless waiting women
eager to hear what they now
most certainly will tell each other.

We remind ourselves that we live in this
other world, unheralded and out of print.
I see your breath escaping,
a chain of silvery globes rising above you,
and I turn, for I have touched just now,
and I strain for that strange and
shaking world above.

Suzanne Prescott



CREATIVITY

1st Woman: You look ill. What's the matter?

2nd Woman: I'm not feeling well.

1st Woman: Do you have any of the following symptoms? Do you:
Pause in the middle of dusting the upstairs bedroom, open the window and shout "Help, they're holding me prisoner."?
Write all the bad news in your letters in reverse because you can't bear to relate sad tidings?
Wag your tail at dogs?
Take a hamburger into the health food restaurant when you meet your friends there for lunch?
or are you:
A secret super heroine?
A compulsive daydreamer?
A chain dieter?
A habitual server of pie in the sky?

2nd Woman: That all applies to me? What's wrong with me?

1st Woman: I think you've got a bad case of creativity. I have an idea.

2nd Woman: How much did it cost?

1st Woman: Ideas are free. Creativity is dear.

2nd Woman: Are the union dues that high?

1st Woman: There is no creativity union. When you're creative people tend to try to take chunks out of you. So your creativity becomes dear.

2nd Woman: I don't see any notches in you.

1st Woman: I'm not very creative. I'm only internationally famous on my own block.

2nd Woman: Do you really think I might be a creative woman?

1st Woman: It sounds like you are a creative woman and are not aware of it.

2nd Woman: I had a baby last year.

1st Woman: That's reproduction. There's nothing creative about having a baby, but you can raise a child creatively.

2nd Woman: Is there a cure for creativity?

1st Woman: It's an incurable condition. All you can do is alleviate it by developing it and using it.

2nd Woman: Where is a creativity college and how much is tuition?

1st Woman: Write to 000 Imagination Drive, Originality, A.P.O. World. Tuition is curiosity, listening, sensitivity and time.

2nd Woman: What type of degree is conferred?

1st Woman: Degrees. Degrees of awareness and development and knowledge which can build reserves for future creativity.

2nd Woman: Who are the instructors in creativity?

1st Woman: Humankind is the reference book, creativity is primarily a self instructional course.

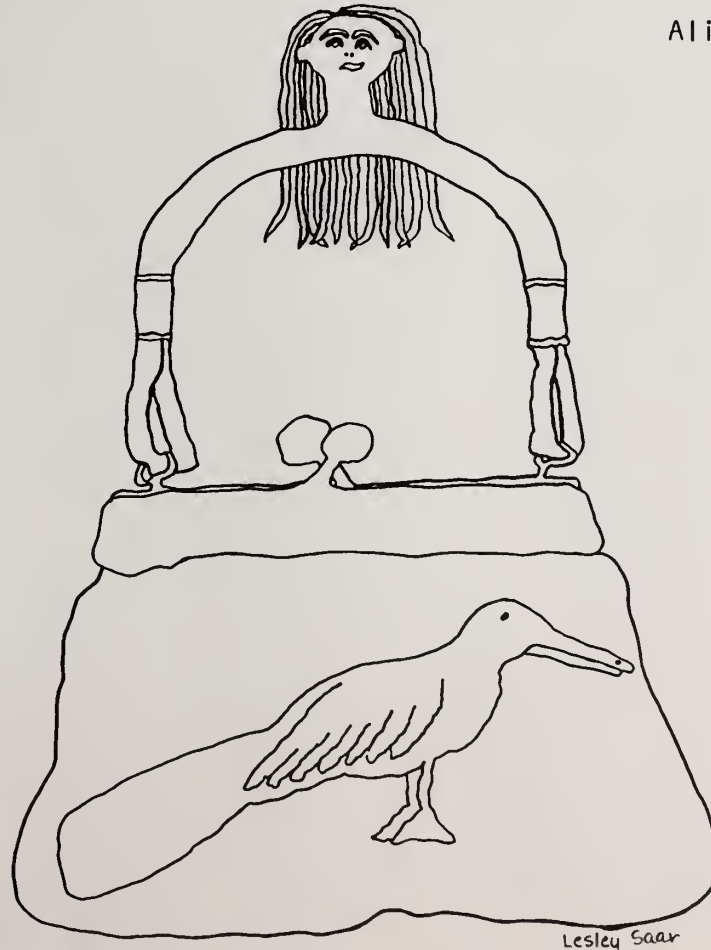
2nd Woman: Is there a requisite for admission or a timeline for completion of work?

1st Woman: You can be creative at any time. Completion is on demand. Whenever someone says - "O.K., be creative" they expect you to comply so you need to compile a creative library complete with catalog and index. Then when someone says: "Be creative about hangnails." or "Be creative about soup." or "Be creative about lice." you know right where to look to find their particular kind of creativity.

2nd Woman: What are the rewards of creativity?

1st Woman: Sometimes money. Sometimes recognition. Usually personal satisfaction. Always relief through expression. Encouragement. Joy in helping others develop their creativity. Sometimes posthumous, which really does not do you a lot of good. We are sustained by creativity but we do not live by it alone - let's go eat lunch.

Alis Ellis



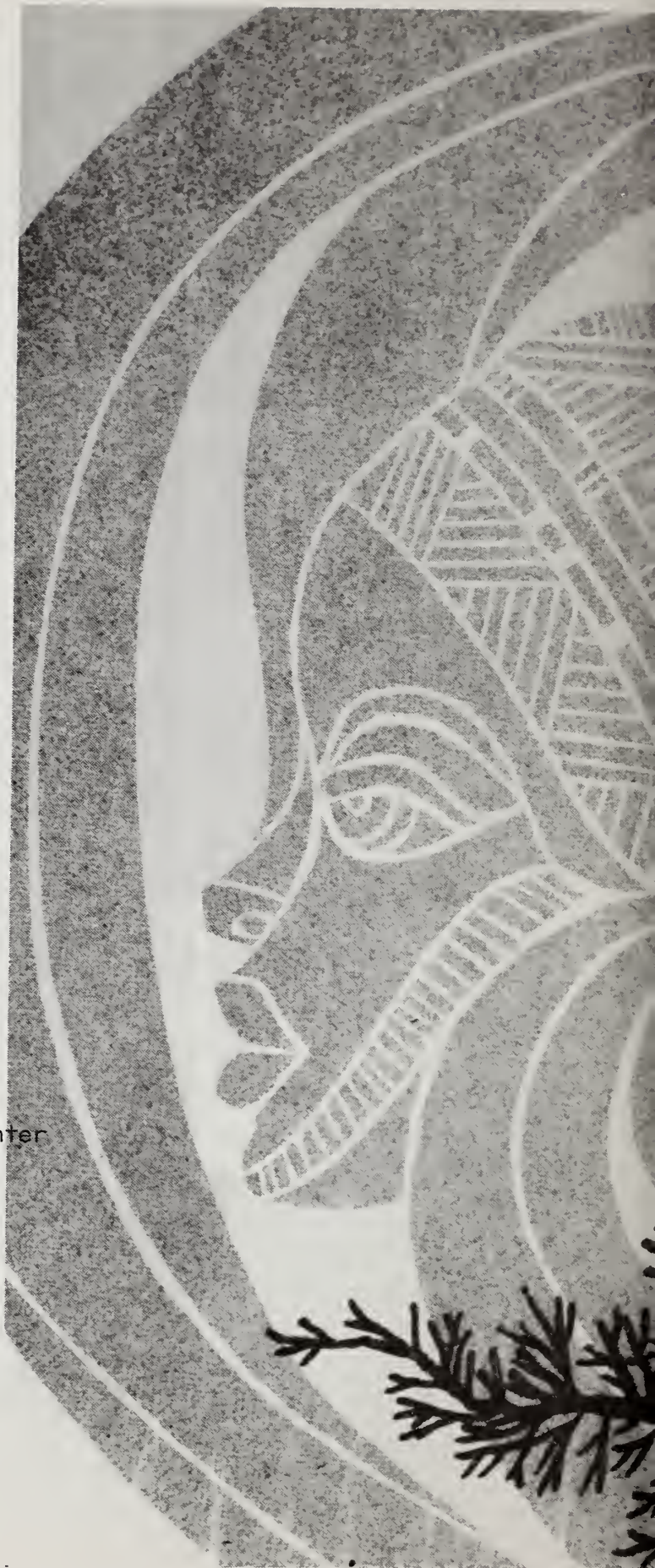
square into circle,
part into whole,
words into feeling ...

WITCH-RHYTHM

I've been to the woods once
just once
and have never returned

After the Amazon sang
tough tones strong songs,
fibrous and healthy powerful proud
some of us met,
two, cackling
crackling fire-coals
hard heated circles for eyes
the nymph, the high priestess
giving visions
that trailed behind them from their mouths
as they spoke as they walked
we two were enraptured
encaptured in their spell-
binding thoughtforms into feelingforms
letting go letting go
we followed,
trusting wimmin-children,
like sisters telling ghost stories
secret syllables in noisy beds

and our lives came round the circle,
back to innocence back to caring,
and the rain crashed into lightning
and the lights fled just for candles
and we carried them different colors,
as the lover then, loving led us
through the dark ways wondrous dark ways
ways forbidden us many centuries
and our lives came round the circle
as she conjured and we joined her
past the oak trees through the meadow
through the bird cries, through their laughter
shrill soundings, hags we were then
weird sisters charming meanings
to hold on to, of our mothers
and their daughters burned for healing
burned for touching, burned for loving
other wimmin who had powers
who had knowledge who had wisdom
who had vision who had circles
and our lives go round the circle
misted forest all alone now
just we wimmin in and out go
through each other without speaking
slowly swaying she starts singing
I'm afraid then never knowing





of my feelings let it go now
come and join us in the circle
as we dance there charming wishes
near the water light the candles
stand around them arms embracing
and the daughter next beside me
in our blanket wrapped together
says she's happy knowing others
who can feel her Mother Wonder
in the forest in the night air
in the water in the moonlight
and our lives went round the circle
and we shouted many tears out
and we whispered many dreamings
and the trees must hear our anger
and our pleasure and our challenge
and the sister writes on paper
what she wishes what she dares for
then we watch the morning lifting
and our candles can be carefree
and we throw them to the water
and she ripples as we touch them
and we feel what we have done there
we have broken through the bramble
and have crafted sister sirens
from the ages long before us
while we planted newer wimmin
in the soft soil seeds are starting
and our lives go round the circle
we have finished what we've started
and the moon rests for a time then
as we walk home silent sleepy
and our lives went round the circle
and we love on never stopping
and we glide with newer knowing
in our journey to each other
and we live on never stopping
and our lives go round the circle
and our lives go round the circle

I've been to the woods once
just once
and have never returned

birdfish

IS THERE A FEMINIST CRITICISM OF LITERATURE?

Because someone I loved and respected gave me Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, I spent hours in Middle Earth, alternately enchanted, bemused, or annoyed. Why did I have the feeling that I had inadvertently stumbled on a boys' secret clubhouse in the woods, where from time to time someone would break into rhyme and song that seemed to be About Something, but wasn't? Why was the only female character the single fantasy figure, Fair Lady Goldberry, idealized and sexless? Why is the whole story sexless. Could it be the dream of a young boy, nearing yet fearing his adolescence? It seemed clearer when I reached the end of Part Two, and met the only other female character--Shelob, "the evil thing in spider form...drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat, weaving webs of shadow, for all living things were her food and her vomit darkness". There we have the archetypal witch, the Bad Mother. I never read Part Three. But the musical lilt of the magic rhyme lost some of its charm for me, as I reinterpreted:

"One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them.

One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them."

Is this feminist criticism or only a female reaction?

When Edmund Wilson describes Kate Chapin's novel The Awakening as a story of lust, and I know it is nothing of the kind, but is a record of courage, self-assertion and her breakthrough into independence, am I doing "feminist criticism", or only exercising female "consciousness"? Carolyn Rhodes, of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, has assembled a reading list on feminist criticism and feminist criticism of science fiction. She cites as the foremothers: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Margaret Fuller, Susan B. Anthony, Virginia Woolf; and as twentieth century spokeswomen, Betty Friedan, Shulamith Firestone, Mary Ellman and Germaine Greer. What is required, she writes, is "an exploration of ideologies, not only feminist ideologies but the underlying assumptions of current literary critics, current religious institutions, current theories of conversion, current social scientists".

For our readers who wish more than a brief acquaintance with the question posed, Professor Rhodes will send a reading list.

HEH

THE FOUR QUEENS

Women authors have been particularly successful in writing detective fiction. Their work has not been of the "hard-boiled" school, but rather, exciting yet gentle stories with ingenious plots, brilliant detectives and a wealth of local color in the Conan Doyle manner. Most frequently the hero or heroine detective unravels the mystery by understanding the personality of the criminal and the tangled emotional states of her characters, and by intuition as well as deduction.

One critic has said, "The four queens--Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers and Ngaio Marsh--represent the best in detective fiction from the 1920s to the present day". Their work has never been surpassed (taken as a whole) but there are many women following their lead: Charity Blackstock, Patricia Moyes, Emma Lathem (actually two women), Joyce Porter, Dell Shannon, Charlotte Armstrong, and many others.

It seems to me these women are assuring us that we can admire intellectual deduction, be thrilled to participate, as it were, in the discovery and apprehension of the criminal, yet not be exposed to violence, sadism and brutal sex scenes in order to be entertained.

Lee Shumer

THE TRIP

We made love
carefully
in Dubuque, Ia.
with a hotel towel beneath us
to protect our secret
from the anonymous eyes
of the maid.
We made love
considerately
on the third floor
of the Julien Motor Inn
in room 323
with moderate success
come of a certain sustained intent
and a tolerance for familiar landscapes.
And then he slept.

Night moths slapped
chalk wings against the street light
just outside,
clustered in a cold light:
instinct - blind, unburned
and implacably repelled.

MOTHER

She dwells in ordered rooms,
exquisite wheels
spinning out her days
in trusting expectation.
She has wrapped his lost visions
in prudent tissue,
tied symmetrically.
All questions answered, long assumed
frame her
warm her hearth.
Saddened
by my rash desertion
of her careful logic:
a turned back.
Loyally,
she offers blind prayers for my salvation.

DOOR COUNTY TWILIGHT

Velvet trees
silken sky
mother-of-pearl moon
buttoning the night against
the ragged clouds
driven across its face

Joan Lewis



Running Horse Ruth Thorne-Thomson 1975

A blue sedan sped along Route 34. Its driver, a woman in her thirties, stared intently at the road. She didn't smile. Her day half over, she had performed a series of sleep-walking house duties. She was now rehearsing the remainder of her day. She went over it and over it, not caring, not feeling involved, for she wasn't. She lived on the periphery. All she knew was that she had escaped so far. She knew she still maintained a hold, a fragile hold on life. The rehearsal continued.

Door locked...did I turn off the kitchen light?...yes, going to the bank, need to stop to mail phone bill, I must remember to call and check on that appointment...

The light ahead turned red. A line of cars began to come to a stop. The forest preserve trees, their branches curving and twisting, sprang into view.

My God - I'm at Western - already - wasn't even thinking - driving along - good God did I stop at the last sign? Could have gone right...

A car horn honked. The light turned green. Cars poured into the crowded intersection from nowhere. Turn signals flashed.

Woman killed in bloody auto crash. Car demolished. Face unidentifiable.

She maneuvered the car across the intersection. Her gloved hands clutched the wheel. The rear view mirror framed a car speeding close to her auto's rearend.

"Damn fool - get off my tail."

The car radio stated the time and weather - 3:30 - wind chill factor ten below zero. She swallowed. Her throat felt sore. She was afraid of that. Too much running around in cold weather.

As she swung the car back onto the main street she considered herself clever because she had been able to drive in and out of the bank drive-up in five minutes. The radio announced the time.

Mail bills, go to the grocery store - remember to buy meat for Saturday's dinner. Carl and Carole, what do they eat?...

"Damn. Hurry up fool - get on with it."

The older driver in front of her finally turned into the gas station - she sped hurriedly around him, braking heavily at the next stop sign.

The parking lot was a mass of moving cars, people.

"Fight for a place to park as usual."

Helen slid the car into a space.

Have to get the car washed. No time.

An angry mother pulled her son along by the arm, shoving a loaded shopping cart in front of her. Her hair blew across her face. She dropped her son's arm to clear the hair from her eyes - her son ran ahead of her - she yelled.

"Hey Helen."

A slight red-haired woman, a cavernous bag hanging from her shoulder, her black wool slacks flopping around her ankles tugged on Helen's arm just inside the electric door. In a flurry of carts and people they found a square foot of unoccupied tile floor and exchanged a few words. Helen was agitated. She didn't hear what the woman was saying - the woman never said anything, she would only make Helen late. Helen adjusted her scarf and took off her gloves. An older woman tottered into her trying to push a shopping cart. The older woman smelled.

The trivial conversation continued - the woman complained about something. Helen watched the old woman finally turn her cart toward the electric door and work her way outside. A rush of cold air - the door clicked shut.

Older woman found dead in apartment. No one to care for her...cold and starvation were...

Her friend was saying goodbye. Helen forced her face into a hearty smile and jabbered on about how nice it had been to see the woman. They parted.

That old woman probably had no friends...

She was tired. Groceries were far too expensive. It was colder now. Her throat ached. Darkness was settling fast. She strained to see out the window as she backed

out of her parking space.

A scream and crash pierced the air as a woman instantly killed a small boy and his mother as she backed out of her parking space. The woman was arrested.

She carefully backed out of her parking space. Cars lined up to exit into the main street. Helen fidgeted. The traffic moved.

She sped along toward the train station. At the next crowded intersection a jumble of people moved among the cars to cross the street. They were laborers from the factory - loud, laughing. In the glare of the car headlights and street lights she stared at them - blacks, whites, young, old, loud women, louder men. She looked at the lock on the door across from her.

A woman was abducted by a man who jumped into the seat beside her at a stop sign and held a knife -

With a shiver she followed the stream of cars through the intersection. She relaxed. The car radio gave the time. She wouldn't be late for Phil's train.

"Damn, forgot to mail that bill."

She accelerated - maybe she'd have time before meeting Phil's train.

Arriving at the station she parked along a side street where a long line of wives waited for husbands. She kept the car running. She was still cold. It was dark. She amused herself by watching the train track for Phil's train. Finally a train horn blast, a bright light, noise, and the train slid into the station belching out scores of people who ran and hurried in all directions. Helen sighed - almost contented. Phil could drive. She would relax and they would talk. She waited. The train pulled away. Cars all around her were leaving. She waited. Phil was late. The next train would come in ten minutes. She sat back, dropping her hands from the wheel. A man came along the street. He walked quickly. Helen smiled - then leaned forward straining her eyes into the darkness. Phil - Is it Phil? - She was frightened - not to be able to recognize her own husband. A car passed by. The man headed toward her. He walked past the car and crossed the street. He continued walking.

A woman was brutally raped in her car by a man. She was waiting for her husband. He never came.

She shivered again. The radio gave the time and the news began:

"...man shot in robbery on the north side of the city..."

Helen watched the train track.

"...two children burned in fire..."

She thought that maybe Phil would be on the next train - but maybe he had tried to call her - she wasn't home.

"...and a woman was found stabbed to death in an alley behind her home.

Police are trying to determine if she had been -"

Helen snapped off the radio. She clutched the steering wheel and looked around her. She was cold, tired - she tried to tell herself that that's all it was. She strained through the window. There weren't as many men in black overcoats now - surely she would recognize her own husband even in the darkness. Tears crept into her eyes; she swallowed.

Phil waved as he approached the car. She unlocked the driver's door and slid over. He opened the door hurriedly, throwing his attache case on the back seat. Cold air filled the car.

"Hell, Hon, you don't have to worry and lock the door all the time! How are ya, anyway?"

He put the car in gear and quickly moved into the street. He smiled but he didn't really look at her.

"Oh, I'm just fine."

"Good. I'm bushed. Need a good dinner What did ya do today?"

"Well - the grocery shopping and-"

"Good. How much?"

"Oh sixty dollars or so - you know the party Saturday night..."

"Hell yes."

He turned on the radio.

"Want to catch the news."

"...a three year old child was beaten to death by her mother's boyfriend..."

"...2300 people were laid off at the Radcliffe Factory today..."

Phil drove hurriedly along. Helen watched him. He maneuvered the car easily, he was quick, alert. But she didn't have to watch him to know this. He looked over at her and smiled. The radio droned on.

"I'm glad you had an easy day Hon, I had a terrible day; ya see Halper wanted his client..."

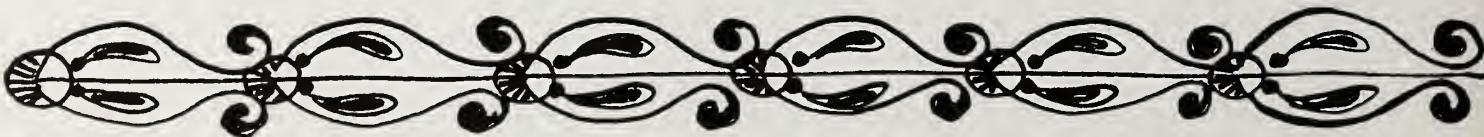
She didn't hear him. She felt on the seat beside her for her purse. Yes, it was still there. She looked out the front window of the car. She imagined that a car approaching them in the other lane careened across the line smashing into them head on. The car passed by. She remembered she had forgotten to mail the phone bill.

Elizabeth A. Havey

WHERE TO GET IT: Update

Paid My Dues - Quarterly journal of women and music.

New mailing address: P. O. Box 6517, Chicago, Illinois 60680



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UNDER THE MILKING STOOL

The Reconstruction of an Elizabethan Folk Tune

As we know, the songs sung by women had to be worded carefully. A bald statement of fact, a bent for satire or a hint of iconoclasm was likely to draw down upon oneself the wrath of the community. It was not unusual to "dee an ald maide" (often from starvation, since survival itself depended on the good will of men) or to be burned at the stake.

Nevertheless, women could, and did, use song to communicate with each other through words and phrases whose meaning was known only to the female sub-culture. Some songs, more explicitly worded, were only sung in all-female gatherings and passed down from mother to daughter.

Many women's songs, as they were picked up and passed on by members of the dominant culture, were distorted beyond recognition. Whole phrases, and the patterning which was important to the meaning, were dropped or changed. Verses were rejected or rewritten to fit the bias of the singer. In comparatively recent years the collector of folk songs (even when entrusted with a woman's song previously hidden) would ignore "meaningless" phrases and reject versions of a song, or a particular verse, as "non-authentic".

"Must I Go Bound While...", attributed to the Elizabethan era was believed to be a common (if unusually pithy) lament, a tale of unrequited love. The following version has been reconstructed from clues found in the orthodox versions and from recently discovered fragments and lines. (Sources include an inscription on a stone found to be the sill support from the window of a castle tower, fragments in a diary interpreting certain cryptic carvings on the underside of a milking stool, which had been handed down from mother to daughter for several generations, and a translation from the druidic symbols carved in the crook of a shepherdess.)

MUST I GO BOUND

Must I go bound while you go free
Must I live a life of misery
Must I then play a losing game
And live a lie that has no name

Must one be weak and one be strong
Must one be right and one be wrong
Must I be blind and I not see
That custom binds and words decree

Must I (be) the one to wear the shame
Must I (be) the one that gets the blame
Must I bear fault and fault again
For shame that's in the heart of men



Excerpted from UP FROM UNDER THE
MILKING STOOL, a new musicology
by Haroldine Childe

S.K.

Riddle

Question: What's the difference between a girl and a boy?

Answer: That one is a girl and the other's a boy.

Question: What is it that's the same for a girl and a boy?

Answer: More than some people think.

. . . I'm Like Me by
Siv Widerberg

Studies have shown that children's books tend to feature boys in the major roles. Historically, females were stereotyped as being passive, dependent, and ineffectual while boys were aggressive, independent and forceful. Studies also showed that girls read books about boys, while boys didn't like books about girls. Children preferred books that were action filled, and because it was permissible for boys to be involved in all sorts of daring adventures while girls had to remain demurely in the background, it was no wonder that the majority of books written for children had a male as the main character. Naturally, with economics and social mores in mind, publishers chose books predominately male in tone while authors and illustrators obliged by creating stories with male heroes human and animal. It is not difficult to find numerous picture books showing Momma Bear in apron drying the dishes while Papa Bear, with pipe and slippers, reclines in his easy chair.

Why have the Nancy Drew series continued to be so popular with young girls for almost 50 years? Though not great literature, Nancy is depicted as an independent, enterprising teenager who solves one mystery after another. Young girls love the adventure and secretly imagine themselves fearless and brave, solving the mysteries themselves. After all, in books about the past, how many female characters like Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn or Jim Hawkins could a girl relate to other than Alice in Adventures in

Wonderland or Through the Looking Glass, Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, or Jo in Little Women - not too many. Is it no wonder then, that the Nancy Drew series had so many readers?

How many mothers in children's books worked? If a female did hold a job, it was either as teacher, nurse or secretary and those women were usually single - a mother's place was in the home! Today, thanks to many women's groups, children's book publishers are being made aware of the sexist image women have had in books and we are beginning to see stories reflecting women as individuals. Girls are being depicted as brave and independent while a boy is not called a sissy for being gentle and sensitive. William's Doll by Charlotte Zoloto (1972) is a tender story of how a little boy wants a doll but his request at first is refused by his father, who feels he will be ridiculed by other children. This book continues to be the brunt of jokes by both boys and girls when first read in class, but with intelligent discussion, young children can be made to understand that there is nothing wrong with a boy wanting to play with a doll. Today many parents share childrearing and we even find some fathers who are raising their children alone. No one ever made fun of a little boy hugging his teddy bear. (Velveteen Rabbit, 1926 or Winnie the Pooh, 1926) so why the fuss over a doll?

Several excellent stories show girls as resourceful, brave and courageous. Karana, a twelve-year-old Indian girl, is the sole survivor on a deserted island for eighteen years in Scott O'Dell's The Island of the Blue Dolphin, 1961 Newbery Award (outstanding children's book of the year as selected by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association). Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead, the 1973 Newbery Award, is another story of a courageous girl who survives alone the North Slope of Alaska and learns to communicate with the wolves, who in turn help her survive. Although not a Newbery winner, a modern fantasy, Charlotte's Web by E. B. White (1952) has become a classic and must be rated as one of the outstanding children's books

of all time, beloved by adults and children alike. Charlotte A Cavatica is a highly intelligent, shrewd, and loyal spider who saves her good friend, Wilbur, from becoming ham and bacon by spinning the words "some pig," "terrific," "radiant" and "humble" in her web. Louise Fitzhugh's Harriet the Spy (1964) portrays a highly individualistic heroine who wants to be a great writer. Claudia in E. L. Konigsburg's From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, the 1968 Newbery Award, takes the initiative in devising a plan for herself and her brother to escape from their house in the suburbs to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Naomi by Bernice Rabe (1975) is about a farm girl in Missouri in the late 1930's who rejects the idea of marriage at the age of fourteen, the custom in her area, and decides to become a doctor.

In the article "Sexual Bias in Science Fiction for Children", Janice Tate notes that science fiction has traditionally been considered "boy's literature" and the characters have been mainly white, middle class males. However, one exception is a marvelous science fiction tale and the 1963 Newbery Award, A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle. Meg leads the search for her missing father by traveling through space by means of a tesseract (a wrinkle in space). All the characters in this imaginative story are highly individualistic - Charles Wallace is Meg's precocious five-year-old brother, Mrs. Murray, Meg's mother is a scientist with a doctor's degree in biology and bacteriology while Meg's father is a brilliant scientist.

Mothers are no longer depicted as stereotyped, contented housewives in aprons. There are mother dentists, scientists, writers, artists, lawyers and students. Some mothers are separated, widowed or divorced while others have never married like Brett's unmarried mother in the candid, contemporary story by Norma Klein, Mom, the Wolf Man and Me (1972).

Picture books too, are providing an important source to acquaint young children with appropriate sex role behavior. Again boys predominate as a study of Caldecott Awards (distinguished picture book of the year as selected by the

Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association) from 1953 to 1971 showed there were 261 pictures of males and only 23 pictures of females - a ratio of 11 to 1 and the ratio of male to female animals was an unbelievable 95 to 1.

Some non-sexist picture books include Don't You Remember by Lucille Clifton (1973) about Tate, a black four-year-old who wants to work in the plant just like her daddy, and Firegirl (1972) by Gibson Rich the story of Brenda, a little girl who wants to become a firefighter but encounters opposition when her father tells her that only boys can be firemen. Picture books are beginning to show females in occupations that have been stereotyped as male. Joel Rothman's I Can be Anything (1973), Eve Merriam's Mommies at Work, and Joe Lasker's Mothers Can Do Anything (1972) show mothers as pilots, doctors, automobile assemblers and builders of bridges. My Doctor (1973) by Harlow Rockwell, presents a little boy's visit to a female doctor. Career books for older children include women geologists, veterinarians and lawyers. Besides fiction, there are excellent biographies and autobiographies about courageous women, although here again there are considerably more stories of men than of women (see Dick and Jane as Victims, issued by Women on Words and Images). A few of the more memorable females are Ann Frank in The Diary of a Young Girl (1951), Harriet Tubman in Harriet and the Promised Land and Helen Keller: Toward the Light. Collections of great women are also being compiled, books such as Famous American Women (1970) by Hope Stoddard and An Album of Women in American History (1972) by Clair Ingraham are two such works.

Several years ago the National Education Association published a pamphlet entitled A Child's Right to Equal Reading by Verne Moberg which examines the patterns of sexual stereotyping in children's books and the ways in which they reinforce inequality. The pamphlet also suggests methods to conduct community workshops with parents, teachers, administrators and librarians to investigate ways in which sexual stereotypes in books affect children. Some of the questions that NEA encourages their work participants to ask themselves when analyzing books include:

Which kinds of activities and feelings



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do books permit or prohibit for girls and boys? In the roles presented, are boys allowed to cry? Girls to be adventurous? Are boys as well as girls encouraged to care for younger children? May girls be physically strong, or exercise intellectual curiosity?

How many fathers in the books wear aprons? How many mothers work outside the home? Are boys ever described as being especially emotional? Do any boys dream of getting married one day? Are there girls who want to be plumbers or architects? Does the author seem sympathetic to individuals in these atypical roles? Does he respect them?

Remember, it is not necessary to stop using certain books just because they are considered sexist, but be prepared to discuss the book's bias with the children. Be aware of publications that list non-sexist books and discuss sex-role stereotyping (see references at the end of this article). Children's book publishers are only recently responding to the cries of the Women's Movement. As parents, educators and librarians, it is our responsibility to identify stereotypes in our children's books whether sexist or racist.

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